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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000030

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SUBJECT: PRC - HOLY SEE RELATIONS IN FLUX; VATICAN CONVENES CHINA  
POLICY MEETING

REF: A. 06 BEIJING 24422 B. 06 HONG KONG 4610 C. VATICAN 0020

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CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher J. Sandrolini, Charge, AMEMB VATICAN,  
STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: The Vatican convened a two-day meeting on January 19 and 20 to address its China policy. The meeting, presided over by Cardinal Secretary of State Bertone, sought to formulate a unified policy toward China to address the continuing challenges presented by the GoC including a spate of recent illicit ordinations and the arrest of priests. The Pope, who was kept apprised of the deliberations and results, will address a letter to Chinese Catholics in the near future. End Summary

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Illicit Ordinations Provoke "Profound Sorrow" by Pope Benedict  
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12. (C) Reftel A reported the illicit episcopal ordination of Father Wang Renlei in Xuzhou on November 30, 2006. Wang's illicit ordination as a bishop had been preceded by two other illicit ordinations earlier in 2006. In reaction to the Wang ordination, the Vatican issued a statement on December 3, 2006 stating, inter alia, that the "Holy Father learned about the news (of the ordinations) with profound sorrow" because the ordination was conferred without a pontifical mandate. The Vatican also indicated that "it deplores the way of proceeding in the ordination of the priest, Wang Renlei, and hopes that incidents of the kind will not be repeated in the future."

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Holy See Secretary of State: "Ordination was an Accident"  
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13. (C) A few days later on December 5, 2006, Holy See Secretary of State (PM-equivalent) Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone said the illicit ordination of Wang had not significantly affected the dialogue between the Holy See and Beijing but also was not helpful in improving relations with the Holy See and the Catholic Church. There will be more "accidents" such as this ordination said Bertone. Commenting on Holy See - China diplomatic relations, Bertone added that it is more a matter of when than if, and added that China's leaders have their own times and rhythms for the framing and realization of the relations.

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Hong Kong Cardinal: Excommunicate State-Appointed Bishops  
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14. (C) According to a UK press report in late December 2006, Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen called on Pope Benedict to excommunicate China's state-appointed bishops. Zen said the "time had come for an uncompromising stance." Until recently, said Zen, there was a de facto compromise between the Holy See and GoC whereby the official Church would only elevate bishops after receiving tacit approval from the Vatican. That compromise has run its course, said Zen.

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China Expert: Patriotic Association Fighting Its Last Battles  
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15. (C) Vatican-affiliated China expert Father Bernardo Cervellera, editor of Asia News Service, told us in December that despite GoC statements to the contrary, the GoC has not been very successful in ordaining bishops. The GoC is now resorting to tricks and heavy-handed tactics to accomplish its goal of nationalizing the Catholic Church in China. He added that the Catholic faithful support the communion between the Pope and their church leaders and have refused to attend these illicit ordinations. The fact that there have been only three ordinations since the death of John Paul II, said Cervellera, demonstrates the GoC's inability to control the church. The Patriotic Association of Chinese Catholics is "fighting its last battles", and there will be no diplomatic relations between the Holy See and GoC until the Patriotic Association ceases to exist.

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Vatican Holds Meeting to Discuss Chinese Catholic Church  
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16. (C) At the behest of Pope Benedict, the Vatican held a two-day meeting on January 19 and 20 presided over by Cardinal Secretary of State Bertone, along with representatives from the

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Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and key bishops from China. The purpose of the meeting was to formulate a unified policy toward the GoC in response to the continued efforts of the GoC to conduct illicit ordinations. The Vatican's statement, released at the conclusion of the meeting, highlighted the Vatican's hope that dialogue with the GoC will result in the "normalization of relations on all levels."

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17. (C) The Statement indicated that meeting participants examined the most serious and urgent ecclesial problems facing the Chinese Catholic Church which include the recent illicit ordinations of bishops and the arrest of priests. The Vatican specifically pointed to the "heroism of the many faithful, priests and bishops of the underground church who have suffered persecution" and thanked them for their loyalty to the Holy Father. The Statement concluded indicating the Holy Father was briefed of the results of the meeting and will address a letter to the Catholics in China in the near future.

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Comment  
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18. (C) Comment: One of the major barriers to the establishment of full diplomatic relations between China and the Holy See is the question of the nomination of bishops. The Holy See insists that only the Pope can nominate Catholic bishops, but Beijing has so far refused to allow the Holy See this latitude. Many observers predict that the two sides will eventually come to a modus vivendi, as has happened elsewhere. For example, the Holy See might nominate only those bishops known to be acceptable to the government.

19. (C) Comment Continued: Recent reporting also indicates that the lines between the Patriotic Association and underground church in China are blurring, which may indicate eventual movement toward the normalization of relations. The Vatican

specifically noted in its January 20th post-China meeting statement that the Church is in communion with almost all of the bishops and priests in the official church. While our interlocutors state the situation with Holy See - GoC relations is "unclear", the intent of the recent Vatican meeting on China appears aimed toward moving diplomatic relations with China forward. Cardinal Zen's remarks take a harder line, as he has tended to do in the past. We await with interest the promised papal letter to China's Catholics, as that should clarify the Holy See's position. End Comment.  
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